

Skype Consort & Emma Björling BIO (2024)

Skype Consort & Emma Björling perform trans-Atlantic arrangements of songs and tunes from Sweden, Norway, Ireland, Scotland, England, Québec, Acadia, the USA, as well as original compositions. Each musician brings their own individual interpretation to these traditions to create this extraordinary collaboration, consisting of voices, fiddle, nyckelharpa, cello, bouzouki, banjo, and percussion. Collectively, the band presents an assortment of whirling polskas, groovy reels, passionate love songs, breathtaking hymns, and original compositions.

Skype Consort was formed in 1999, has performed and toured extensively, and has 8 full-length albums. In late 2018, Skype Consort, in collaboration with Emma Björling, created a new repertoire grown from Scandinavian, Québécois and Celtic roots. The recording was released on LEAF Music in May 2019 and is distributed worldwide on Naxos. Their self-titled debut album, **Skype Consort & Emma Björling**, won the OPUS (QC, Canada) award for best world music album 2020.

The second collaborative recording between Skype Consort and Emma Björling, entitled **Ode & Ballade**, features Emma Björling (lead voice, percussion), Seán Dagher (lead voice, Irish bouzouki, banjo), Amanda Keesmaat (cello, voice), Simon Alexandre (nyckelharpa, violin, voice), and Alex Kehler (nyckelharpa, violin, voice) on the album, also composing and arranging. The musicians sing in three languages (Swedish, French, English), and the words “ode” and “ballade” resonate with meaning in all three: poem, song, tale, sonnet, folly, chant, and dance. The music of this album combines elements from world music and classical traditions to offer audiences thoughtful arrangements and creative compositions: a Swedish Polska accompanied by Québec foot percussion and 18th-century Scottish-style chords, a French song with Norwegian-sounding interludes between the verses, a Purcell/Playford-style dance tune with Swedish texts and accompanied on the banjo. About half of the repertoire is original compositions by the members of Skype Consort & Emma Björling and all are original arrangements for this formation.

The touring configuration of the band presents 4 musicians from the *Ode & Ballade* recording, featuring either Alex Kehler or Simon Alexandre on nyckelharpa, fiddle, and voice.

The genre, dubbed "trans-Atlantic Chamber Folk" by Lyra Magazine (Sweden), creates a sound that is unique among folk artists and classical chamber ensembles. Through the group's love of different folk traditions and baroque styles, they uncover and present many haunting texts and sonic elements from different worlds that take audiences on an unforgettable journey.

All within the group are seasoned instructors eager to share their knowledge and love for their musical traditions in workshops and school programs.

Emma Björling (lead voice, shruti box, percussion) is an award-winning Swedish singer, composer, arranger, active in the renowned Scandinavian bands Kongero and Lyy. Both bands have toured the world, and are busy in the European folk-trad scene. Emma regularly teaches and conducts workshops all over the world.

Alex Kehler (fiddle, nyckelharpa, vocals) In addition to his work with Skye Consort, he is a member of La Nef, Soulwood, Kehler Williams duo, Les Siffleurs de Nuits, and Triton.

Simon Alexandre (fiddle, nyckelharpa, vocals) is a member of the Orchestre symphonique du Saguenay-Lac-Saint-Jean and plays regularly with the Orchestre symphonique de Québec, Ensemble Galileo, the Orchestre symphonique de Sherbrooke, and folk ensemble, Andrew Wells-Oberegger.

Amanda Keesmaat (cello, vocals) Principal cellist of Arion Baroque orchestra and Space Time Continuo, Amanda Keesmaat, has also performed with Les Charbonniers de L'Enfer, OktoEcho, Jean-François Bélanger and Projet ClaireObscur.

Seán Dagher (cittern/bouzouki, banjo & vocals) is the artistic director of La Nef and an active performer, arranger, and composer of music from various folk and classical music traditions. He won the OPUS "Creation of the Year" award in 2014 for *Sea Songs* and has been nominated for numerous Adisq awards. He is renowned for his sea shanties with Ubisoft video games, Assassin's Creed and Black Flag. He is also host of the popular YouTube Series, *Shanty of the Week*, and has toured Europe, Ireland, Canada, and the US with UK group, The Longest Johns.